



Republican Policy Committee

Don Nickles, Chairman Kelly Johnston, Staff Director 347 Russell Senate Office Building (202)224-2946

May 23, 1995

Mass Murder in Oklahoma — 17 Years Later

Most Americans probably believe that the Oklahoma City bombers are going to be brought to justice swiftly and surely. Most Americans probably are going to be sorely disappointed.

American justice is rarely swift, particularly when the crimes are the most serious.

Prior to the Oklahoma City bombing, Oklahoma's most notorious mass murderer killed nine persons, including children, by shooting them at pointblank range. That was in 1978 — 17 years ago — and that murderer, Roger Dale Stafford, Sr., is still on death row.

The Lorenz Family Murder

On June 21, 1978, after searching unsuccessfully for a business to rob, Roger Dale Stafford, his wife, Verna, and his brother, Harold, decided to stop their car, raise the hood, and feign distress, in hopes that a wealthy and vulnerable Good Samaritan would come along. They pulled their car to the side of the road, and Verna Stafford attempted to flag down passing cars. Roger and Harold Stafford lay in wait in the darkness.

Eventually, a blue Ford pickup truck with a white camper shell pulled off the road, and the driver, Air Force Sergeant Melvin Lorenz approached Verna Stafford with an offer to help. Sergeant Lorenz looked under the hood of the Stafford automobile and said that he could find nothing wrong. At that point, the Stafford brothers confronted Sergeant Lorenz and demanded his wallet. Roger Stafford was armed with a pistol. Sergeant Lorenz informed the Staffords that he and his family were on their way to his mother's funeral in North Dakota, and that he could give him some money, but not all that he had. Roger Dale Stafford then shot Sergeant Lorenz twice, killing him.

Hearing the shots, Linda Lorenz, Sergeant Lorenz's wife, got out of the pickup truck and ran toward her husband. Verna Stafford knocked Mrs. Lorenz to the ground, and Roger Stafford shot her as she fell, killing her.

The murderers then heard a child calling from the back of the camper. Roger Stafford approached the camper, cut a hole in the screen, and fired his pistol into the darkness, forever silencing 11-year-old Richard Lorenz.

A month later, the homicidal Staffords struck again:

The Sirloin Stockade Mass Murder

On July 16, 1978, Roger, Verna, and Harold Stafford robbed the Sirloin Stockade Restaurant in Oklahoma City. The trio waited in the restaurant's parking lot until all the customers had left, then knocked on the side door of the restaurant. When the manager answered, he was greeted by Roger and Harold Stafford pointing guns at him. They forced him to take them to the cash register and the office safe.

Harold and Verna Stafford held five employees at gun-point while Roger Stafford had the manager empty the office safe which contained almost \$1,300. All six employees were then ordered inside the restaurant's walk-in freezer. Once inside, both men opened fire on the employees. Roger Stafford told Verna that it was time for her to take part. He placed his gun in her hand and helped her pull the trigger.

All six Sirloin Stockade employees died as a result of the shootings. They were: Terri Michelle Horst, age 15; David Gregory Salsman, age 15; David Lindsay, age 17; Anthony Tew, age 17; Louis Zacarias, age 46; and Isaac Freeman, age 56.

For the Sirloin Stockade murders, Roger Dale Stafford was convicted on six counts of first-degree murder and sentenced to death for each murder. For the Lorenz murders, Roger Dale Stafford was convicted on three counts of first-degree murder and sentenced to death for each murder.

Justice, though, has yet to be done. Since his convictions, Roger Dale Stafford has made at least 18 reported appearances in Federal and State courts. He has been before the United States Supreme Court six times (1985, 1985, 1985, 1984, 1984, 1984), before the United States Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit once (1994), before the United States District Court once (1994), before the Oklahoma Supreme Court once (1986), and before the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals nine times (1993, 1992, 1991, 1990, 1987, 1985, 1985, 1983, 1983). We know this list omits some appearances that our search didn't turn up (such as a 1995 appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court), and of course it omits all activity at the trial courts, which occurred before the laborious appeals process began.

Roger Dale Stafford's execution date has now been set for July 1, 1995, but his attorney has announced that he will seek another stay of execution. This is the same attorney who recently was appointed to represent Timothy James McVeigh, the man being held for the Oklahoma City bombing.

Staff contact: Lincoln Oliphant, 224-2946

[Sources: The account of the Sirloin Stockade murders is taken from the opinion in *Stafford v. Oklahoma*, 665 P.2d 1205 (Okla.Ct.Crim.App. 1983). The names of the victims are not in the opinion but were found in other sources. The account of the murder of the Lorenz family is taken from the opinion in *Stafford v. Oklahoma*, 669 P.2d 285 (Okla.Ct.Crim.App. 1983). The names of the victims are in the opinion. RPC has citations for each reported appellate decision.]